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Native Races
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An Empire Insurance Society

By
SIR HARRY JOHNSTON
G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

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An earnest message from an African Administrator to those men and women of the British Empire who believe that British solidarity and prosperity depends upon seeking the common weal of the 450,000,000 of His Majesty's loyal subjects, regardless of race, creed and colour.

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THE ABORIGINES PROTECTION SOCIETY

(The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society)

By
Sir HARRY JOHNSTON, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

It may startle a few readers of *The African World* to be told that this is one of the insurance societies of the Empire, that in supporting and strengthening this society they are assisting to support and maintain the British Empire in Africa, Asia, Polynesia, and Tropical America; but so it is.

The function of this association—the full title of which (much too long) is the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society—is to dissipate storm clouds before they burst, to forestall the explosion of grievances by detecting and removing the smoking wrongs, to inquire into all complaints the coloured man or the dark-skinned races wish to bring against the white, against the rule of Europe. A real wrong,

a real cruelty, injustice, robbery, denial of civic or political rights is then brought quietly and sometimes confidentially before the competent authorities, in the hope that it may be investigated promptly, and, if proved, be remedied and set right.

Not infrequently the complaint of the native, individual or tribal, is found to be based on fanciful grounds, or even to be lacking any sufficient justification. In such cases nothing more is heard of it, at least through the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, and any grievance of the dark-skinned peoples which receives no endorsement from the officers and council of the Aborigines Protection Society may safely be regarded as imaginary, factious, and not worth investigation. You have only to peruse the list of names of the council of this association to satisfy yourself that you are dealing with practical-minded men and women, some of them ex-governors and retired administrators, others lawyers of eminence or men of business in the cities of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow; most of them people who have travelled considerably and studied much.

I write of this important focus of opinion as a form of insurance for the British Empire because with it in existence we can be pretty confident that nothing really bad in our administration is going on anywhere *without our knowledge* in Africa, Tropical Asia, Polynesia, and the British West Indies. The wrong-doing against the native may not be remedied or immediately remedied, through some fault in the white adminis-

trators or governments, but these latter cannot, when the "burst-up" comes, plead that they sinned or blundered unwittingly. To be just, I should say that in the majority of cases submitted to it by the Aborigines Protection Society the Government—Colonial Office, Foreign Office, India Office—does take action, does go carefully into evidence, and when satisfied that a wrong policy has been followed, a grave injustice been inflicted, hastens to set right the wrong, either in the case of an individual or a people. That is why the general public in reality hears so little (proportionately) of the activities of the Aborigines Protection Society. There may be three cases or causes reported in the Press in the course of twelve months, but the Society may have investigated three hundred, rejected one hundred, and got one hundred and ninety-seven arranged or settled by the two opposing parties or by the intervention of the British or of some Dominion Government. Thus, many a native grievance that might be drifting on towards serious discontent, riots, risings, is nipped in the bud.

The Aborigines Protection Society confines its activities usually to the British Empire, and in that chiefly to the large portion of the British Empire which is governed from London. Australia has its own society for protecting the interests of the aboriginal population of Australia and New Guinea. The Maori aborigines of New Zealand have equal political rights with the white population and require no champion or protection. There is a nascent society

attending to the claims of the coloured people and the negroes within the Union territories of South Africa. Canada has a most efficient State Department looking after the interests of the Red Indian and Eskimo elements in its population. It is in India, Burma, Malaysia, Ceylon, Polynesia, British Africa between the Limpopo and the Orange River on the south and the Mediterranean and Sahara on the north, together with British Tropical America, that the work of the Aborigines Protection Society mainly lies. It only took up the affairs of the Leopoldian Congo prior to its annexation by Belgium because of British responsibility by treaty over that area; it has only remonstrated against cruelty, injustice, and slavery in Tripoli, Morocco, and Abyssinia, and in one or two other parts of Africa, in Peru and Ecuador, because there were no responsible or civilised Governments in those regions, or because in some way the British Government was involved in special relations with the misgoverning Power. The United States is rapidly relieving the London Aborigines Society of concern for the affairs of South America by coming forward as the champion of the cruelly oppressed Amerindian natives of Yucatan and Nicaragua,of innermost Ecuador and Peru. Italy has made herself responsible for Tripoli and France for Morocco. The sphere of the Aborigines Protection Society of London is now virtually restricted to those portions of the British Empire which are without direct representative institutions.

"But this work," you might say, "ought to be done by a Government Department, by a branch of the Colonial Office, by the Agents for the Crown Colonies and Protectorates." True. In theory it should. Theoretically, the Crown Agents are paid out of taxes levied on black and yellow men as well as on white : and when black, brown, yellow subjects of the Crown are in trouble or in difficulties their case should find an advocate in the Crown Agent's Office at Millwall or Whitehall. But, apart from the fact that the Crown Agents do not operate for India, this rôle of champion of aboriginal rights and defender of oppressed coloured people could not well be fulfilled by a branch of the Colonial Office or the India Office or Foreign Office. It must be undertaken by an impartial body of men and women not connected with and controlled by the Government, yet at the same time by an association inspiring respect because of its absolute disinterestedness—except as to the good government of the Empire—its accumulated knowledge and experience, its practical-mindedness, and the personal standing of its component members.

All these conditions are fulfilled, I maintain, by the Aborigines Protection Society of London. Its collective opinion is Imperial—that is to say, it believes a British Empire to be the best solution of the difficulties which beset the backward peoples of Asia and Africa ; but it must be an Empire founded on strict justice and inspired by the ethics of Christianity. The Aborigines Protection Society has pleaded and

remonstrated against misdoings of the military régime in Egypt, both before and after the war, but it has never espoused the cause of the Egyptian "Nationalists," because it was quick to realize that the existing "National" movement in Egypt is nothing but a plot to restore the blasting Turkish rule over North-East Africa, with its concomitant persecution of Christians, its slave trade, and its gross financial corruption. The Aborigines Protection Society similarly distinguishes between the need for justice to India and the Indians and the danger of any pan-Islamic sway over India, which might restore the grinding, enslaving tyranny of the Moguls.

The enemies of the Aborigines Protection Society are :—

1. The enemies of the British Empire, the foreign foes, jealous rivals, impossible cranks and anarchists who wish to see it break up, preferably through misgovernment.

2. The greedy and short-sighted folk in our own land, whose leading ideas are "get rich quick," "after us the deluge," "be hanged to native rights if I can scoop in another million or so and then retire."

3. The ignorant and blustering, the typical Afrikander, white man or woman, who knows nothing of Africa beyond his own dorp or farm or mine or mushroom city, who does not realize that South Africa is only a prolongation of Central Africa, that the mis-treatment of the negroes in South Africa may upset the Empire in East Africa, and that injustice

to the West African or Central African peoples will re-act badly on the prosperity and peace of South Africa ; or, again, the would-be colonist of East Africa, who thinks East Africa could be "run" on white labour alone, or the "black-bird" recruiter of the Pacific, who, provided he can make a hundred pounds out of kidnapped Melanesians, is indifferent to the irreparable damage done.

Also might be numbered among the dislikers of the Aborigines Protection Society the distillers, who want to poison West and South Africa and the Pacific Islands with their alcohol ; the bureaucrats, who hate having to revise their "choses jugées" ; the untravelled Secretaries of State for the Colonies, who think it "damned impertinence" on our part that we should object to their ignorance of geography and ethnology ; the sentimentalists, who think the negro can do no wrong, and that the primeval savage needs no discipline and control ; and, finally, the purblind fools who do not realize that our Empire contains 390,000,000 despotically governed brown, yellow, and black people who are rapidly becoming educated and observant, and who will not much longer stand injustice and stupidity of Government without devastating rebellions, but who are still in a condition to be won over to an enthusiastic support of the British Empire and an efficient co-operation with their white fellow-citizens.

The Aborigines Protection Society may be regarded as the test of our far-flung rule. If it flourishes, has a

huge membership, and becomes a great power, our Empire may be regarded as safe and assured. If it withers, is not listened to, and dies away—Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin !

H. H. JOHNSTON.

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What We Think

AN EMPIRE INSURANCE SOCIETY

Sir Harry Johnston's outspoken claim in the Supplement to this issue for a whole-hearted support for the Aborigines' Protection Society is sure to provoke attention, if not criticism. Sir Harry claims that through its operations it is an insurance society of the Empire in that its work tends to "dissipate storm-clouds before they burst," and that among the foes of the society is "the sentimentalist who thinks the negro can do no wrong." We do not dispute the correctness of the "character" given to the society as it exists to-day by its distinguished champion. Hitherto we confess we have not always seen eye to eye with all the operations of the society, but we are ready to believe that its activities are infused with a new spirit, born of actual knowledge and personal experience, for which we may perhaps guess that Mr. J. H. Harris is responsible. Mr. Harris's personal knowledge of the conditions under which natives live in Equatorial Africa, for instance, is extensive. Sir Harry racily catalogues the enemies of the Aborigines' Protection Society, and we will not quarrel with the list. Certainly we have no sympathy with "untravelled Secretaries of State," from whose ignorance not only native races but hard-working officials have suffered grievously in the past, and whose lofty scorn of those who expose their shortcomings merely brands them as superior jacks-in-office of a peculiarly objectionable kind. But we should like to offer a mild protest against Sir Harry's sweeping condemnation of the Afrikander. It does not carry our conviction. Sir Harry's knowledge of trans-Zambezian Africa is perhaps unequalled, but is it hazardous to assume that with the country south of the Zambezi he is not quite so intimately acquainted as he is with every region north of the Victoria Falls?

The African World.

The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society

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